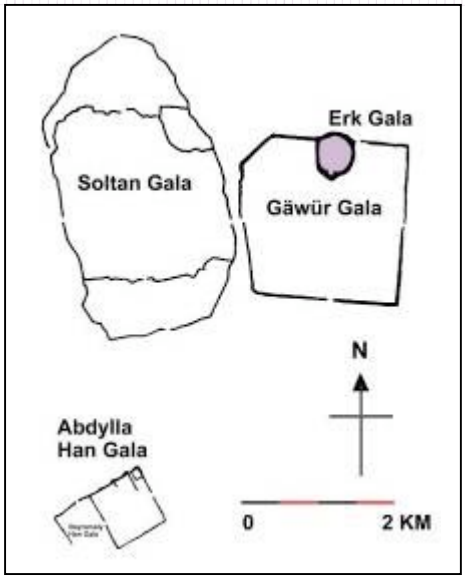
THE HISTORY OF MERV AND ITS MONUMENTS

BEFORE MERV

The oasis of Merv was part of the land of Margush or Margiana. In the Bronze Age, in the early second millennium BC (see Timeline page 4), the River Murghab provided water and rich silts to make the land fertile for cultivation. People probably settled all over the oasis and irrigated their fields from the river. We only find evidence of their occupation in the north, probably because they abandoned their settlements elsewhere because of the onset of the desert. The settlements they built show evidence of a civilisation which is amongst the earliest in Central Asia. The largest settlement discovered so far is at Gonur-depe.

In the 17th to the 15th centuries BC their settlement sites are abandoned, probably because the climate changed and became there was less rainfall and less water in river delta resulting in these areas becoming desert. People now moved to the heart of the oasis.

In the Iron Age, in the first millennium BC, settlements were established in the south and the east of the oasis along the river Murghab, which must have been dammed by this time.



River Oxus) and the Merv oasis was chosen to build the new city of Erk Kala, which covered about 12 ha. It became a flourishing centre for trade and administration. Extensive walls, built for defence, were constructed of mud brick to enclose an oval. Inside were palaces, temples, houses and army barracks.

During the time of King Darius the Great there were a number of uprisings in the empire. An inscription at Bisitun, near Kermansha in western Iran refers to the crushing of a revolt in the province of Margiana:

'*While I* (Darius) *was in Babylon, there are provinces which rebelled against me – Persia, Elam, Medea, Assyria, Egypt, Parthia, Margiana, Sattagydia, Scythia….one man, Frada, a Margian – him they made chief…He said 'I am king in Margiana.' So I sent against him a Persian, by name Dadarshi, my subject, satrap* (governor) *in Bactria. Thus I said to him: 'Go forth, attack and destroy that army which does not call itself mine!'.*

THE ACHAEMENIAN EMPIRE

In the 6th century BC, Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, founded the Achaemenian Empire, from his kingdom in Persia (now modern Iran). This empire was named after an ancestor of Cyrus the Great, called Achaemenes. At Cyrus' death in 530 BC, his vast empire stretched from Central Asia to Egypt and from western Turkey to northern India. One of Cyrus' successors was Darius I (called the Great) who reigned from 521 BC until his death in 486 BC.

An aerial photograph of Gonur.

ERK GALA

The first settlement at Merv was during the period of the Achaemenian Empire. King Cyrus established a huge empire, united the Medes with the Persians and took over various peoples including the Babylonians and the Phoenicians. He invaded the area known as Transoxiana (around the

An aerial view of Erk Kala with the city of Gyaur Kala (see page 14) in the background. The city is protected by high walls and it has a high point, the citadel, inside it. Excavations showed that the earliest settlement at Erk Kala lies 17 m below the present-day surface – a continuous sequence of mud brick buildings spanning nearly 2,000 years years.

A cut through the defensive wall at Erk Kala shows its construction of carefully-laid mud bricks.

Part of a mosaic from the Roman city of Pompeii in Italy. It pictures Alexander the Great at the Battle of Issus where he defeated the Persian army.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

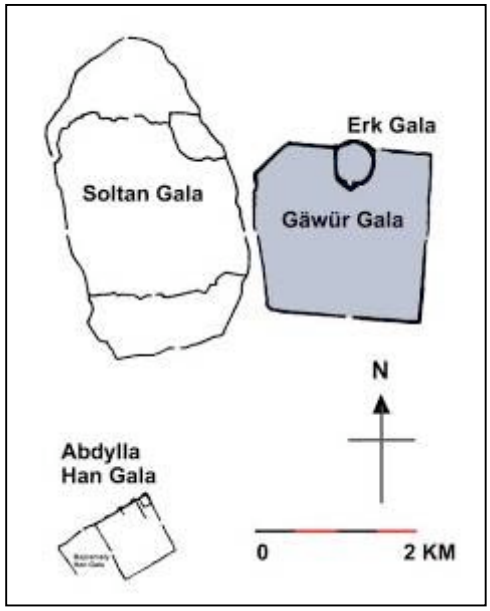
In the late 4th century BC Merv, and the region around it, became part of the Hellenistic (Greek) world. Around 336 BC the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, began his campaign against the Achaemenid Empire as he led his army of Macedonians and Greeks across Central Asia towards India. Erk Kala was soon conquered by Alexander himself, or one of his generals. After Alexander's death in 323 BC his empire was divided into kingdoms and governed by his generals who bitterly fought with each other. The whole of his empire was taken over by others.

After Alexander, the city of Erk Kala saw a period of unrest until Seleucus I, from Macedonia, gained control of the Asian part of Alexander's empire in about 322 BC. According to Roman sources, the city was destroyed (see next section).

THE MONUMENTS

Erk Kala is best approached through Gyaur Kala (see map on inside back cover). It is a steep climb over the defences on the south side. At the highest point you will see the remains of a Seljuk watch tower and from here there is a good view of the original city of Erk Kala.

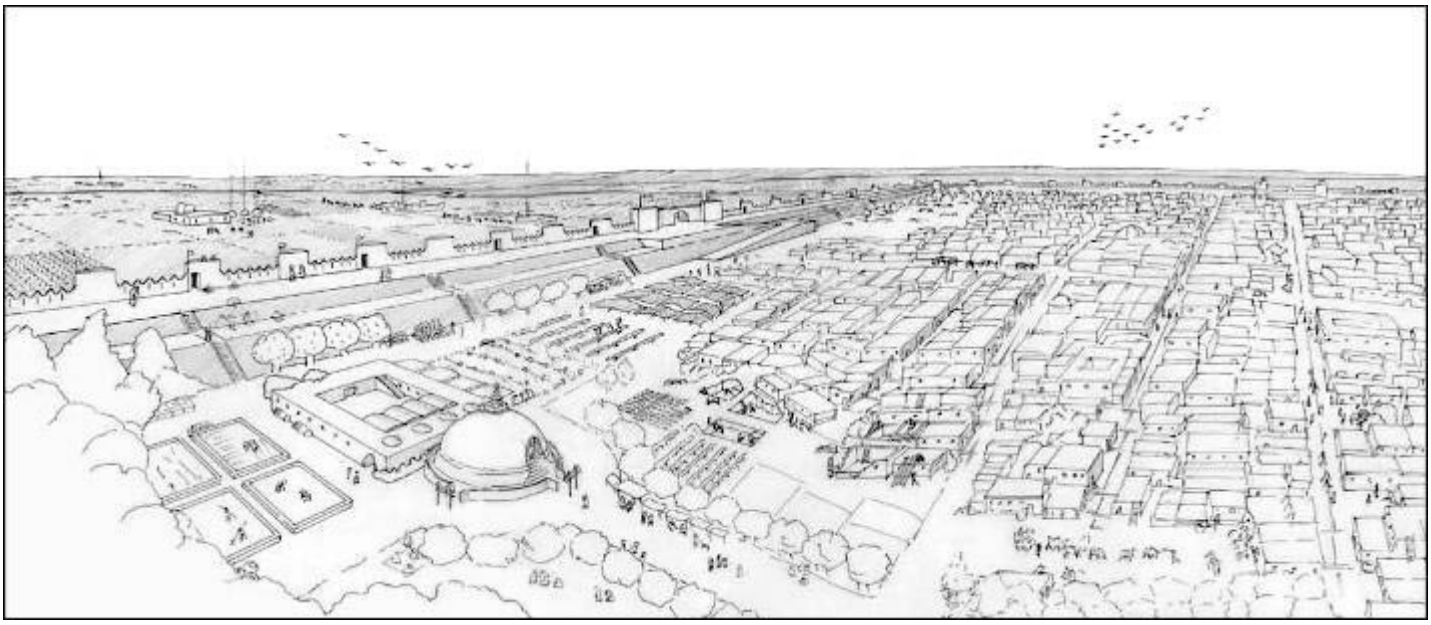
View of Erk Kala from the road through Gyaur Kala.



GYAUR KALA

SELEUCIDS

Early in the history of the Seleucid Empire, Antiochus I, the son of its founder Seleucus I, built a new city at Merv which incorporated the first city of Erk Kala. The new city was much bigger. A rough square, 2 km across covering about 340 ha, was enclosed in defensive walls. This Greek city, with Greek features such as a rectangular grid system of streets, theatres and markets, was named Antiochia



An artist's impression of how part of Gyaur Kala might have looked. The Buddhist stupa and monastery is shown bottom left.

Margiana. Erk Kala, with its strong defences, became the new city's citadel.

Alexander founded Alexandria in Margiana, which was later destroyed by the barbarians, but Antiochus, son of Seleucus, restored the Syrian city in the very same place, through which passes the River Marg, which flows into the Lake of Zotkha. Antiochus preferred the city to bear his own name.
Pliny the Elder, Roman writer on natural history, history and science. AD 23-79.

Margiana is surrounded by deserts. Admiring its fertility, Antiochus enclosed a circuit of 1,500 stadia with a wall and founded a city – Antiochia. The soil of the country is well suited for growing vines.*
Strabo, Roman geographer. Lived about 64 BC – AD 21.

*a stadium was a Greek measure of length equal to 184 metres.

A satellite photograph of Gyaur Kala.

PARTHIANS

Parthia was originally a province of the Achaemenid Empire which came under Seleucid control. In 247 BC, under their leader Arsaces I, the Parthians rebelled and by the 2nd century BC ruled an empire which stretched from the River Euphrates to Afghanistan and north as far as the River Oxus. Antiochia Margiana became the Parthian's eastern outpost for their empire, with their capital at Nisa, around 250 BC. The city developed as a major administrative, military and trading centre.

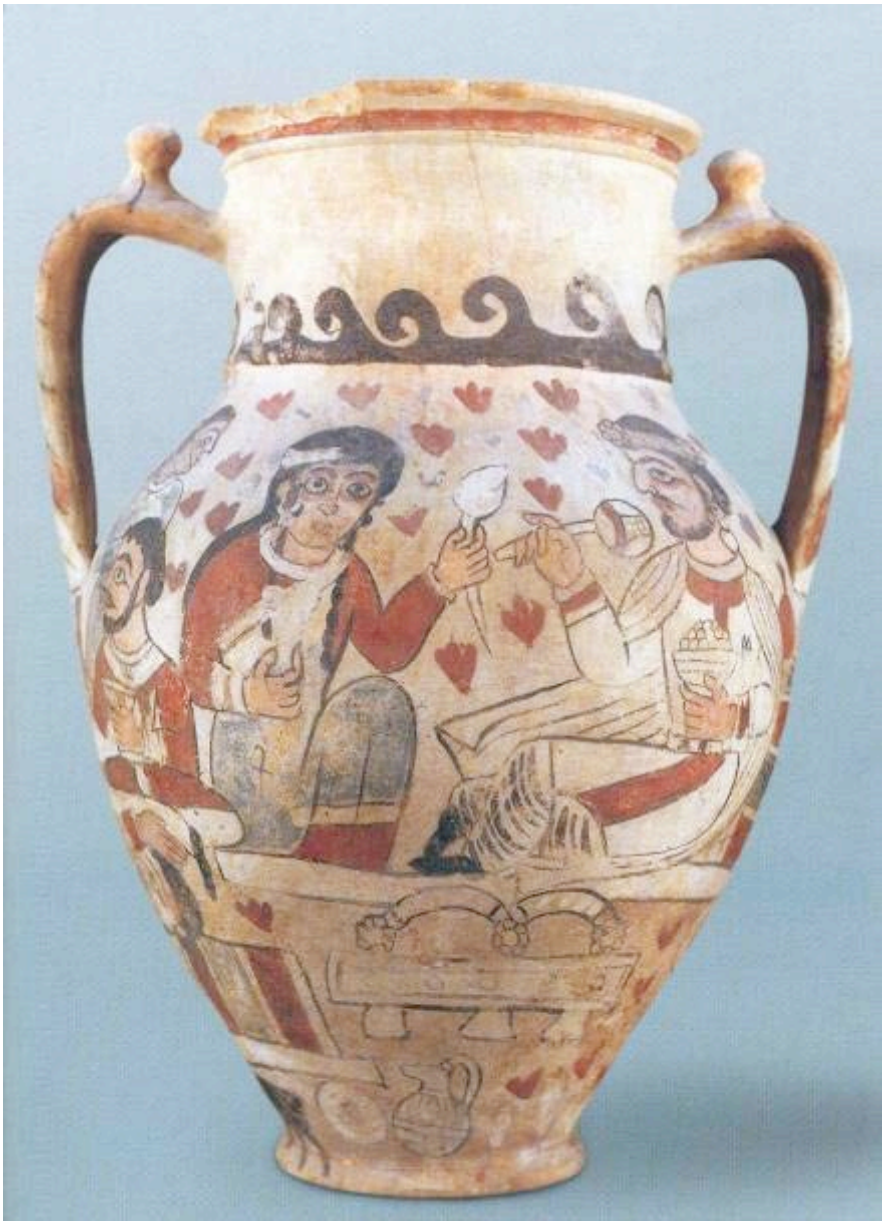
The city's defences were strengthened against rival empires and peoples who were attracted by its ideal location along the Silk Roads (see page 4).

Parthia and Rome

The Romans suffered one of their few military defeats against the Parthians. The Romans invaded their territory in northern Mesopotamia in 54 BC. Marcus Licinius Crassus led an army of seven legions (about 44,000 troops in all) against the enemy but were defeated at the battle of Carrhae. Only 10,000 men escaped to reach Syria while another 10,000 were settled as prisoners at Merv. A Chinese historian in the 1st century AD describes some paintings which show troops attacking a city in Turkmenistan while the defenders are using the military siege tactic of the *testudo* – soldiers interlocking their curved rectangular shields over their heads to protect themselves against missiles.

SASANIANS

Despite the defences against their enemies the people of Antiochia Margiana were overcome by the armies of the Sasanian ruler, Ardashir, in 220 BC. He ruled a small kingdom in the province of Fars in south-western Iran, who had overthrown the last Parthian king around 224 BC. Ardashir's son and successor, Shapur I, appointed a *marzban* (or 'guard of the frontier') to govern the city of Merv.



Painted vase from the Buddhist monastery in Antiochia Margiana. This vase is also thought to show Zoroastrian religious rites.

RELIGIONS

We have evidence that during the Sasanian period the religions of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism were practised in the city.

Zoroastrianism: a Persian religious reformer, Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) founded this religion. He is said to have received a vision from *Ahura Mazda* (the Wise Lord), one of the many gods worshipped at the time who urged him to believe in one god. After the Persian king's conversion Zoroastrianism spread from the 6th century BC. The followers worshipped only *Ahura Mazda* as the creator and their practices included the preservation of the sacred fire in fire temples and the disposal of their dead by exposure on 'towers of silence'.

Buddhism: Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was born around 566 BC in one of the small states which came part of the Mauryan Empire in India. He founded the religion called Buddhism. He believed that each person should do good works, be disciplined in their life and meditate. After his death a group of followers established an order of monks and began to spread this religious belief. Monasteries had a special building, called a *stupa*, for rituals and to hold relics associated with the Buddha. In Turkmenistan *stupas* have domed roofs. The westernmost Buddhist stupa can be found in the south-east corner of the city (see photo below – on the next page).

THE MONUMENTS

Apart from visiting Erk Kala via Gyaur Kala and investigating the walls (see below) you can see the remains of the Friday Mosque or Beni Makhan Mosque which was built in the second half of the 7th century AD. The mosque was restored in the Seljuk period. You can also visit the Buddhist monastery and *stupa* which is in the south east corner of Gyaur Kala.

A view of the Buddhist monastery and stupa from the walls of Gyaur Kala. These mounds represent the eroded mud brick walls of the building.

A cut through the walls of Gyaur Kala are shown here. Archaeologists have cleaned the surface revealing all the different phases of construction.

DEFENDING GYAUR KALA

The city walls are square and run for 15li (about 8000 metres).*The inhabitants made the city gates with iron..*

This is part of a description of Antiochia Margiana by a Chinese prisoner, called Du Huan, held in Merv in AD 765 under the Abbasids (see next section). Each section of the square walls are about 2 km long and there were originally four gates, one on each wall.

The ancient city of Gyaur Kala was surrounded by an 8 kms defensive wall. The fortifications are now corroded but survive up to a height of 20m. They consisted of a city wall strengthened with towers at regular intervals and four gates which led in and out of the city

A cut bulldozed through the walls of Gyaur Kala by the Russians in the early 20th century (to pipe water into the inside for irrigation – a scheme which was abandoned) allowed an archaeological investigation of a complex sequence of defensive walls.

View along the top of Gyaur Kala's walls. As the ground dries out it reveals the layers of mud bricks used to construct the defensive walls.

The first wall was built around 280 BC and consisted of an earthen wall, about 6m high, with a gallery walkway. After that, the wall was repeatedly strengthened and enlarged to withstand the military demands of the time.

Distinctive features which can still be recognized today include in-filled gallery walkways, arrow-slits, and a huge corner-bastion.

This photograph, taken from inside the walls, clearly shows the gallery walkways which allowed soldiers to patrol and defend Gyaur Kala at different periods.

Interpreting the defences

The photographs on the right have been annotated to show each phase of the defensive walls of Gyaur Kala.

On the right you can see the three main phases of the wall around Gyaur Kala:

1. Seleucid wall, around 280 BC.
2. Parthian wall, around second century BC.
3. Late Parthian wall, around first century AD.
4. All phases.

A. Filled-in access gallery.
B. Arrow slit.
C. Outer defences.
D. Erosion debris.

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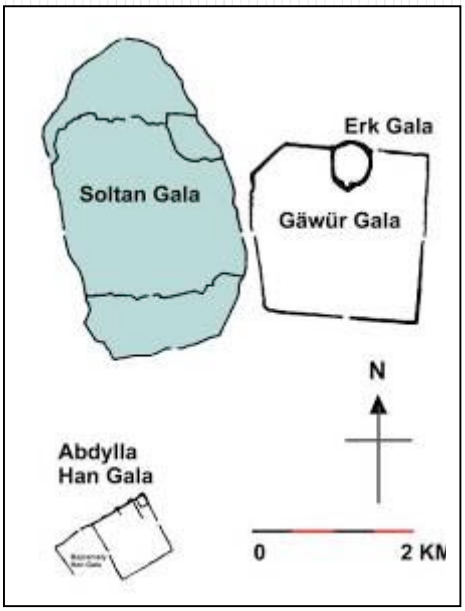


SULTAN KALA

A NEW ERA

In the 7th century AD, Merv went through a period of decline. By AD 653 Persia had been overrun by Muslim armies. In AD 651 the last Sasanian king, Yazdigird III, tried to take refuge at Merv and use it as a base to resist the Arab forces, but the city closed its gates to him. He was murdered near Merv. The arrival of Muslim Arab armies marked the beginning of a new era in which Islam became not only the main religion but also a dominant cultural force.

Merv now came under Muslim rule within the Umayyad Empire. The city became the capital of Khurasan ('Eastern Land'). The new Arab ruler renamed the city Gyaur Kala, meaning 'City of Pagans', because of the number of religions they found there. Arab troops were stationed there and some of the inhabitants of Basra and Kufa in southern Iraq moved there and constructed a new city alongside the original towns of Erk Kala and Gyaur Kala. Shaim Kala was a self-contained walled town outside the eastern gates of Gyaur Kala. As the capital of the province, Merv now attracted merchants and skilled craftspeople. There is archaeological evidence for cotton growing, textiles and steel making, for example.

The original expansion of Merv under Arab rule, at Shaim Kala outside the eastern gates of Gyaur Kala, was largely destroyed under a Soviet planned village.

Photograph taken in the 1950s of the remains of a house at Shaim Kala.

UMAYYAD AND ABBASID DYNASTIES

The **Ummayad** dynasty was founded by Mu'awiya with its capital in Damascus. The Umayyads took control of the Arab empire from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad in AD 661. Umayyad forces moved into North Africa, Spain, Tranoxiana and north east India. In AD 748, the city commander at Merv, Abū Muslim, famously raised the black **Abbasid** banners proclaiming the start of the revolution against the Umayyads. Abū Muslim led armies in the campaigns in Iran and Iraq. But in AD 755 he was lured to Iraq and assassinated. The Abbasids moved their capital from Damascus to the new round city of Baghdad, breaking the Syrian domination of the Ummayad Caliphate.

ABBASID MERV

The capital of the Abbasid empire was at Baghdad but Merv remained the capital of the Khurasan province. Under Abū Muslim's rule, a new city, Marv al-Shahijan (meaning 'Merv the Great' or perhaps 'belonging to or the soul of the king'), was built to the west of Gyaur Kala. This area is now known as Sultan Kala.

Abū Muslim commissioned a mosque to be built alongside the Majan Canal, which flowed about a kilometre to the west of Gyaur Kala. It was an area in which there had been earlier settlement – defended houses (*köshks*) were built by the 7th century. Abū Muslim's mosque lay in the centre of a new thriving city. The city was planned, with an organised street system and a carefully managed water supply with numerous canals and reservoirs for each district – fresh water needed for houses and for the practice of Islam.

As Marv al- Shahijan grew in importance, so Gyaur Kala slowly began to change and decline. By the 9th century its defences had fallen out of use. The former city became the industrial quarter for the new city.

For its cleaniness, its good streets, the divisions of its buildings and quarters among the rivers and gardens and the separation of the people of each suq from another, their city (Merv) *is superior to the rest of the cities of Khurasan.*
Al-Istakhri, an Islamic geographer writing sometime before AD 951.

Marv, a large town. In the days of old the residence of the mir (governor) *of Khurasan was there but now he lives in Bukhara. It is a pleasant and flourishing place with a citadel….in it there are numerous köshks. It used to be the abode of the Sasanian kings. In all Khurasan there is no town better situated. Its market is good.*
An unknown geographer writing in AD 982.

FROM THE TAHIRIDS TO THE SELJUKS

In AD 821 Tahir ibn Hossein was appointed governor of Merv but soon after that declared independence from the Abbasid Empire and starts the **Tahirid** dynasty. Merv becomes the Tahirid capital. The province of Khurasan continued to be prosperous and peaceful until the Tahirids were challenged by the leader of the **Saffarids** in AD 873. However this was a period of disturbances in the province with attempts to establish Merv as an independent power. The confused state of affairs ended in AD 900 when the **Samanids** took power. They were originally from Iran. However, by AD 977, Khurasan was in the hands of a new dynasty, the **Ghaznevids** from Afghanistan. In 1039 Merv was the base for the final attempt by the Ghaznevids to destroy the advancing Seljuks.

SELJUK MERV

THE SELJUKS

In the 10th century AD a Turkish nomadic tribe, the Seljuks became an important power in the Islamic world. By 1055, led by Tughrul Beg, they entered Baghdad and took control of the eastern territories of the Muslim empire. The Seljuks and their successors were called sultans, not caliphs as previously, and maintained an Islamic social order by a common religion and law, the Arabic language and trade. The Seljuk period was from 1038-1194, although an offshoot, The Seljuk Sultanate of Rum ruled in Anatolia until 1307.

SULTAN KALA

By the time the Seljuks came to power in the 10th century, the city of Merv had become one of the largest cities in the world and the capital of an empire that stretched from the Amu Darya (the River Oxus) to the Mediterranean. Successive rulers had developed the extensive water system started by Abū Muslim and built many important structures.

The Seljuk rulers took over Merv in 1037 and by 1040 it was the capital of the Seljuk empire. The Seljuks continued to add to the city, and in about 1080 Sultan Malik Shah constructed the massive walls surrounding Sultan Kala. The defensive walls of Merv, over 9 km in length, enclosed an area of 550 ha, including separate walled suburbs to the north and south. Aerial photography (see page 26) shows that Sultan Kala was densely occupied on

either side of the Majan Canal, with a large number of houses set out on a grid system of streets.

Sultan Kala was famous for its beautiful gardens and as a centre for trade where people from far and wide would come to exchange their goods. Besides the houses and the markets, there were baths (*hamans*), mosques and *madaris* (Islamic theological schools). Inside the city, and along the roads leading out, were *caravanserais*. These were large buildings which acted as shelters for traders with their camels or mules, often in their hundreds. They were places to rest as well as provided security, storage, food and repair of equipment. There was a large industrial quarter in the western suburbs, mainly producing pottery, including highly decorated wares which were in great demand along the trade routes.

Shahriyar Ark, or 'the Royal Citadel', was constructed in the 11th century. The walled circuit enclosed an area of nearly 20 ha, containing a palace complex, administrative buildings and fine houses and gardens for the most important residents.

A CULTURAL CENTRE

In the Seljuk period Merv became one of the most important cultural centres in the eastern Muslim world. There were several libraries here and a number of outstanding scholars visited or lived here. The famous poet, mathematician and astronomer Omar Khayyam (died about 1130) worked on his astronomical tables at the now long lost observatory in Merv. He had been asked by the Seljuk Sultan, Malik Shah, to revise the calendar. The geographer Yaqut al-Khamavi lived in Merv in the early 13th century for three years and was reputed to have first had the idea of compiling a detailed geographical dictionary of countries.

SULTAN SANJAR

During the reign of the Seljuk sultan, Sanjar, Merv reachest the high point in its history. Sultan Sanjar ruled the Seljuk Empire from Merv for sixty years. Sultan Sanjar engaged in several military campaigns during his reign. In one of them, against the Ghuzz Turkmen tribes, he was defeated and taken prisoner in 1153. It was a disastrous period for Merv. The Ghuszz plundered and killed after the Seljuk army had abandoned the city. Sanjar remained in captivity for three years but escaped and re-established himself at Merv, dying in 1157 at the age of 71.

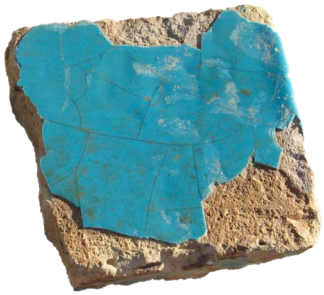
SULTAN SANJAR'S MAUSOLEUM

When Sultan Sanjar died he was buried in the magnificent mausoleum in the centre of Sultan Kala, which still dominates Merv and its surrounding landscape. Now in isolation, the building was once part of a major complex of religious buildings, all now below the ground or in low ruins on the surface. The mausoleum itself is square and capped by a dome and the geographer Yaqut describes it: *Despite the vast extent of his kingdom, Sultan Sanjar, son of Malik-Shah the Seljuk, chose it* (Merv) *above the rest of his cities and continued to live there until his death. His tomb is there in a vast dome and a window towards the great mosque. Its dome is blue and can be seen from a day's journey away.* The exterior of the dome has a complex arrangement of galleries and, below that arches with intricate designs.

Restoration

Although the writer Isfizari, in the 11th century, declared that Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum was '*..one of the greatest constructions of the world's kingdoms, so strong that it would be impossible to destroy it*', this great building has suffered over the years. The photograph here shows its state when it was photographed by the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission in 1890. Since then there have been four restorations – in 1937, in the 1980s, in 1996 and finally one completed in 2004.

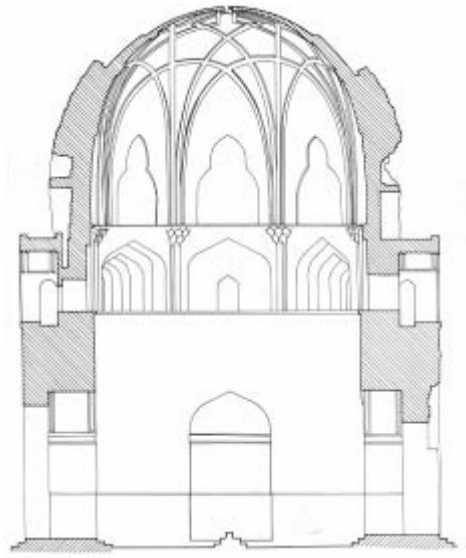
This aerial photo shows the remains of the complex of religious buildings which survive around the mausoleum.



A damaged turquoise tile from the dome of Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum.

This photograph of the mausoleum taken in 1890 shows how much of the original construction survived until then.

The inside of the mausoleum has also been restored. This shows the dome with its painted decoration.

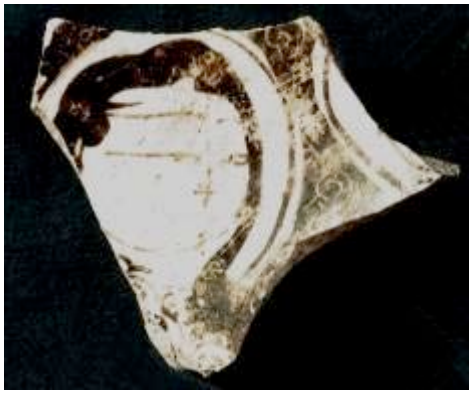


Drawing showing the construction of the interior of the mausoleum.

This photograph taken in the autumn of 2004 shows the most recent restoration of Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum.

AFTER SANJAR

With the death of Sanjar in 1157, the power of the Seljuk's began to wane and the empire was under constant threat from the warmongering Mongols. In 1221 a Mongol force arrived at the gates of Merv. They spent six days riding around the defences looking for the weak points before the city negotiated a surrender. However, the Mongols sacked the city and historical sources claim that they killed over 1.4 million people throughout the Merv Oasis. But this figure is likely to be much too high – even the figure given in Ibn al-Athir's account (below) is probably too many. Although the city had been badly damaged, there is evidence of industry and reused housing in Sultan Kala, showing occupation after the Mongol invasion. Some people suggest that the skilled craftspeople may have been the only ones spared in the massacre.



This sherd of pottery found in Sultan Kala clearly shows the face of a Mongol.

Genghis Khan sat on a golden throne and ordered the troops who had been seized should be brought before him. When they were in front of him, they were executed and the people looked on and wept. When it came to the common people, they separated men, women, children and possessions. It was a memorable day for shrieking and weeping and wailing. They took the wealthy people and beat them and tortured them with all sorts of cruelties in the search for wealth. Some of then died when there was no money left to pay their ransom. Then they set fire to the city and burned the tomb of Sultan Sanjar and dug up his grave looking for money. They said, 'These people have resisted us' so they killed them all. Then Genghis Khan ordered that the dead should be counted and there were around 700,000 corpses.

Ibn al-Athir's account after talking to refugees in Mosul in 1221.

THE MONUMENTS

There are a great many monuments to visit in Sultan Kala apart from Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum (see map on inside back cover).

Shahriyar Ark

The most important building to visit here is the Kepter Khana, prabably a small *köshk* which served as a library or an administrative building. Nearby are the remains of a building which was perhaps the palace of Sultan Sanjar.

View across Shahriyar Ark. The modern building in the background is the rebuilt and enlarged Mosque of Yusuf Hamadani. The complex was originally built around the grave of the dervish Abu Yaqub ibn Ayub, who came from the city of Hamadan in west Iran in the first half of the 12th century.

Shahriyar Ark with the Kepter Khana in the foreground and beyond it the defensive walls.

Defensive walls
Good stretches of the walls of Sultan Kala can be seen on the road that runs between Sultan Kala and Gyaur Kala and the road from the Park entrance towards Shahriyar Ark and beyond.

A great tower of Sultan Kala defending the wall which survives in some places to about 8 metres.

This section of the wall surrounding Shahriyar Ark clearly shows the internal walkway for guards to patrol the wall.

Kyz Bibi
On the road leading to the Great and Little Kyz Kalas is a Seljuk mausoleum and mosque. This was possibly the mausoleum of wife of Sultan Sanjar, Turkan-khatun.

The religious complex of Kyz Bibi.

Great and Little Kyz Kalas
The Great Kyz Kala is the largest *köshk* in the Merv oasis. Its south and east sides are relatively well preserved and there is evidence of rooms and an upper floor to be seen inside. The Little Kyz Kala is close by and less well preserved. It was nearly square and had two storeys. One room inside is relatively well preserved, as is the staircase entrance. Buildings like these may have been semi-fortified palaces or villas, which were built by the wealthy outside the city to act as retreats – buildings which were cool in summer and warm in winter and surrounded by gardens and orchards.

Part of the interior of the Great Kyz Kala showing evidence of vaulting inside rooms.

The staircase entrance to the Little Kyz Kala.

Great Kyz Kala from Little Kyz Kala with Kyz Kibi on the right.

Mausoleum of Muhammad ibn Zayd
Beyond the entrance to the Park is the religious complex of Muhammad ibn Zayd. An inscription dates the building of the mausoleum to 1112. The mausoleum also includes a later mosque or prayer hall and a secondary mausoleum or anteroom. There is also a ruined kitchen complex, a *sardoba* or cistern for water and the mound of a ruined *köshk*.

Mausoleum of Muhammad ibn Zayd.

ABDULLAH KHAN KALA

By the 15th century AD the old city at Sultan Kala was largely abandoned and a new provincial centre was planned, later called Abdullah Khan Kala. The new town, founded by Shah Rukh in c 1409, was rectangular in shape, built about 2 km to the south and covered about 46 ha, all enclosed in a defensive wall with a citadel and four gates. It also had a moat and massive mudbrick walls. The citadel contained the ruler's palace and caravanserai. Unlike other cities, this Timurid city never flourished, although it was still fairly important, strategically, for the next century at least. This was partly due to an increase in maritime trade between Europe and China. Merchants preferred to use the sea rather than the laborious overland route (see pages 8-9) on which Merv's prosperity depended.

Part of the defensive circuit of Abdullah Khan Kala showing the wall, a guard tower (one of 48), moat and eroded defensive wall.

The last great Timurid ruler, Husayn-i Bayqara, came to Merv shortly after 1454 where he married the daughter of the local prince, Mirza Sultan Sanjar. Despite this family connection Mirza staged a coup against Husayn-i Bayqara, but failed.

The west gate of Abdullah Khan Kala photographed in 1890, but now in ruins (see section on Conservation page 30).

By 1470 Husayn had established himself as ruler in Herat and one of his sons ruled in Merv. But the son, Abu'l-Muhsin, and his uncle rebelled against Husayn in 1498 and was besieged in Abdullah Khan Kala:

He raised the defences of Merv and got ready for siege. When the imperial forces arrived outside Merv, they laid siege and began battle, resisted valiantly by Abu'l-Muhsin's soldiers. The whistle of arrows began to draw blood from both sides and sometimes the stones hurled reduced a fortress tower to rubble, and sometimes the vessels of fire thrown into the middle of the imperial forces took many lives. For three or four months the siege continued but in the end both father and son, weary of battle, arranged a ceasefire.
Timurid historian Ghiyath ad-Din Khwandamir (1475 - c 1535)

Abu'l-Muhsin was allowed by his father to go on ruling Merv.

An aerial view of Abdullah Khan Kala looking west with the modern town of Bairam Ali in the background. The citadel is situated in the bottom right-hand corner of the town.

THE TIMURIDS

Timur, known also as Tamerlane, was a Mongol leader, a descendant of Genghis Khan who waged brutal campaigns against Persia, India, Egypt, Syria and the Ottomans. He died marching against China in 1405. His descendants, the Timurids, ruled only in the heartland of Central Asia from his capital was at Samarkand.

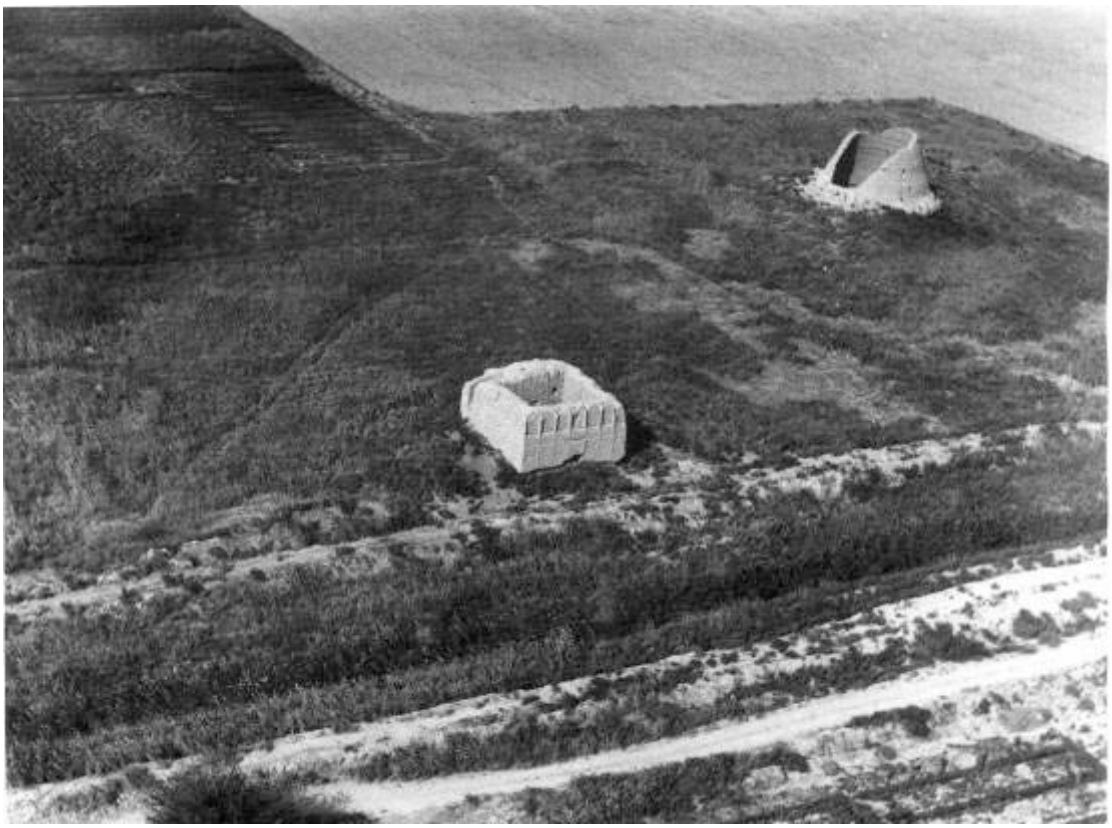
Icehouse north east of Abdullah Khan Kala.

THE MONUMENTS

Apart from the defensive walls of Abdullah Khan Kala, the other monuments from the Timurid period in Merv are:

Icehouses

These conical buildings are thought to be icehouses or snow stores (see map on inside back cover) built in the Seljuk and Timurid periods.



Timurid pavilion and icehouse north east of Abdulla Khan Kala.

Timurid pavilion at Merv.

Timurid iwans in the southern suburb of Sultan Kala.

Pavilion
These were decorative buildings set in a garden with pools and fountains as a place to retreat to in the scorching summer months.

Iwans
In the southern suburb of Sultan Kala are the Timurid iwans and sardoba or water cistern. This is a religious complex built in the 15th century AD around the tombs of the 'standard bearers of the Prophet' – al-Hakim ibn Amr al-Ja'fari and Buraida ibn al-Huseib al-Islami.

MERV AFTER THE TIMURIDS

After the death of Husayn-i Bayqara in 1506 the Timurds ceased to be a powerful force in Khurasan.There were new contenders for the area – the Safavids in Iran and the Uzbeks. In these new conflicts Merv's importance under the Timurids came to an end. 1510 saw a major battle between the Safavids and the Uzbeks. The Uzbeks lost and Merv came under Safavid control but exposed to continual Uzbek raids. The city was destroyed in 1785 and the vital Sultan Band dam destroyed. This caused the main River Murghab channel to move 25 km to the west – the reason why the modern city of Mary is located further west of the historic cities of Merv.